United Nations S/2013/536

Security Council

Distr.: General
9 September 2013

Original: English

Letter dated 6 September 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Security Council is scheduled to hold a high-level meeting on the subject "Small arms: the impact of the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons on international peace and security" on Thursday, 26 September 2013. A concept note, prepared to inform the discussion, is attached (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gary **Quinlan**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 6 September 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Security Council high-level meeting on small arms: the impact of the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons on international peace and security

26 September 2013

Concept note

Australia will convene a high-level meeting of the Security Council on small arms, focusing on the impact of the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons on international peace and security. This meeting will build on the renewed international momentum and focus on small arms and light weapons and allow a timely discussion of the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2013/503) on small arms. It has been five years since the Council last considered this threat in a dedicated way,[1] despite the cross-cutting nature of small arms across the Council's agenda. This meeting will be an opportunity to consider practical steps to strengthen and give best effect to Council responses to small arms and light weapons-related threats to international peace and security. Council members will be invited to participate at the Head of State/Head of Government level. The Secretary-General is expected to brief, along with a small number of other high-level invitees. Australia proposes that the Council adopt a resolution on this issue.

Context

The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons intensify and perpetuate conflict and instability around the world, including in the majority of the conflict situations on the Council's agenda. In many cases, these activities are in violation of Council resolutions, sanctions and embargoes, hinder the effective implementation of United Nations peacekeeping mandates, and threaten the lives of peacekeepers. The illicit use of small arms and light weapons is also integral to other threats to international peace and security, including terrorist acts, piracy and transnational organized crime.

The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons threaten civilians (particularly women and children) in armed conflicts and hamper protection efforts. These activities feed cycles of violence, lead to serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and sustain the viability of armed groups. Their humanitarian consequences are devastating. Their effects undermine State sovereignty, security, governance, the rule of law, development, health and education. The Secretary-General's report

[1] The Council first addressed small arms thematically with a dedicated open debate and presidential statement in 1999. In all, it has adopted six presidential statements on the topic: S/PRST/1999/28, S/PRST/2001/21, S/PRST/2002/30, S/PRST/2004/1, S/PRST/2005/7 and S/PRST/2007/24. The Council held its last open debate on small arms in 2008 upon the issuance of the Secretary-General's report S/2008/258.

(S/2013/503) makes clear the persistent and evolving nature of this threat and the need for integrated responses by the Council.

The Council has recognized that the destabilizing accumulation and illicit manufacture, trade and circulation of small arms and light weapons compromise its effectiveness in discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security,[2] and has responded in a range of ways:

Country situations. The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons have contributed to, and prolonged and intensified instability and conflict in, the majority of the Council's country situations. The Council's decision in March to strengthen the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) represents a clear and strong Council response to a situation aggravated by the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons.[3]

Regional situations. The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons have destabilizing effects across regions, as we are seeing in the Sahel[4] and in Central Africa.[5] The Council has stressed the important role of regional and subregional organizations in addressing small arms and light weapons challenges. It has encouraged the establishment or strengthening of subregional or regional cooperation on illicit trade of small arms and light weapons across borders and also noted the need for the mandates of peacekeeping operations to take into account the regional instruments enabling States to identify and trace illegal small arms and light weapons.[6]

Sanctions and arms embargoes. The Council has in place 11 country-specific arms embargoes, 8 of which relate to countries that also have a peacekeeping or special political mission. The Council has also imposed targeted arms embargoes, including against Al-Qaida, Al-Shabaab and the Taliban, as a means of countering terrorism. Small arms and light weapons fall within the scope of these embargoes. The Council has a responsibility to ensure effective implementation of the embargoes it imposes, which it takes forward through its sanctions committees and associated groups of experts.

Peacekeeping. United Nations missions have an important role in addressing the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. The Council has explicitly tasked peacekeeping operations, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Mali, to assist in addressing small arms and light weapons proliferation and trafficking, including through physical security measures, stockpile management and weapons collection and destruction.[7] The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons also threaten the lives of United Nations peacekeepers and hinder the ability of missions to implement their Council mandates effectively.

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[2] See presidential statement S/PRST/2007/24.

[3] See Security Council resolution 2098 (2013).

[4] See presidential statements S/PRST/2013/10, S/PRST/2013/5, S/PRST/2012/26.

[5] See presidential statement S/PRST/2010/6.

[6] See presidential statement S/PRST/2013/12 and Security Council resolution 1631 (2005).

[7] See resolutions 2112 (2013), 2101 (2013), 2100 (2013) and 2066 (2012).

Peacebuilding, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform. The Council has noted that the destabilizing accumulation and illicit manufacture, trade and circulation of small arms and light weapons in many regions undermine the sustainability of peace agreements and impede the success of peacebuilding.[8] By mandating peacekeeping and special political missions to support peacebuilding efforts, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform activities, the Council plays an important role in preventing future illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. The Council has also recognized the important links between arms embargoes and post-conflict disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform.[9]

Protection of civilians. The Council has expressed grave concern about the effects of the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and the use of such weapons on civilians affected by armed conflict. It has noted that excessive accumulation and the destabilizing effect of small arms and light weapons impede humanitarian assistance and can exacerbate and prolong conflicts, endanger civilians and undermine security and the confidence required for a return to peace and stability.[10]

Women and peace and security. The Council has recognized the link between gender-based violence and the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation, excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons.[11] The Council has urged Member States and international and regional organizations to take further measures to improve women's participation during all stages of peace processes, particularly in conflict resolution, post-conflict planning and peacebuilding.[12]

Children and armed conflict. The Council has highlighted the links between children in armed conflict and the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, reaffirmed its intention to take appropriate action through country-specific resolutions, and urged Member States to take action in accordance with the Programme of Action on Small Arms.[13]

Recent developments

Since the Council last considered this issue thematically in 2008, there have been important multilateral developments, including the consensus outcome of the second Small Arms Review Conference in 2012 and the adoption and opening for signature in 2013 of the Arms Trade Treaty. The Council has also taken action on a range of escalating crises fuelled by the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (including in the Sahel) and established new arms embargoes (including for Libya), as well as new or strengthened peacekeeping operations (including in Mali).

[8] See presidential statement S/PRST/2007/24.
[9] See presidential statements 2007/3 and 2002/30.
[10] See Security Council resolutions 1674 (2006) and 1894 (2009).
[11] See presidential statement 2010/6.
[12] See Security Council resolution 1889 (2009).
[13] See Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1539 (2004) and 1460 (2003).

Objective

The objective of this meeting is to support the existing normative framework and to consider practical steps to strengthen and give best effect to Council responses to small arms and light weapons-related threats to international peace and security. In this context, Council members may wish to consider the following issues in their statements:

- What more can the Council do to ensure effective implementation of sanctions and arms embargoes, particularly through the role of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions? How can the Council improve coordination and cooperation between panels of experts/monitoring groups and United Nations missions and agencies in achieving this?
- Where the Council deploys peacekeeping or special political missions, how does it ensure the mission is equipped to address illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, including in terms of the mission's mandate and composition (and in the context of supporting peacebuilding strategies and activities)? How can peacekeeping and special political missions better support activities such as physical security measures and stockpile management? How can United Nations missions and agencies in neighbouring countries improve coordination to manage illicit flows of small arms and light weapons?
- How can the Council better coordinate with the United Nations system, Member States and regional and subregional organizations in efforts to address illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons? What support can the broader United Nations system provide to ensure the effectiveness of the Council's response to small arms and light weapons challenges?
- How can the Council better ensure that efforts to address small arms and light weapons challenges incorporate civilian protection strategies and that efforts in the protection of civilians in armed conflict and post-conflict scenarios encompass relevant small arms and light weapons challenges? How can the Council better support the participation of women in planning and implementing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform?

Australia proposes that during the high-level meeting, the Council adopt a resolution focusing on the impact of the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. Australia considers that a resolution is needed to reinforce Council efforts to meet its primary responsibility on this issue. The resolution would support the existing normative framework and articulate practical steps to strengthen and give best effect to Council responses to small arms and light weapons-related threats to international peace and security.